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**Youth, Firearms and Violence in Atlanta:
A Problem-Solving Approach**

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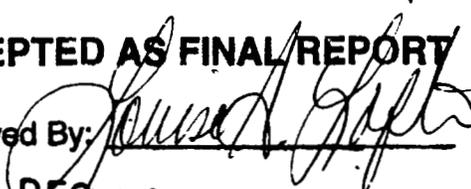
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1993, firearm-related deaths and injuries reached an all-time high among America's youth. The following year, a consortium of federal officials, local agencies and community groups known as Metropolitan Atlanta Project PACT (Pulling America's Communities Together) was established to reduce crime and violence in a five-county area of metropolitan Atlanta. In the consensus-building sessions that followed, juvenile gun violence emerged as a top concern.

With funding provided by the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Emory Center for Injury Control served as the evaluation partner for Metro Atlanta Project PACT's efforts to reduce juvenile gun violence. Baseline measures of the magnitude, extent, and nature of juvenile gun violence in Atlanta were obtained, and our findings were shared with a range of agencies and community groups. Through a lengthy series of training and problem-solving sessions, the best ideas of local law enforcement officers and juvenile justice officials were combined with promising programs from other cities to produce a list of candidate interventions. Over the next 3 years, a number of these ideas were implemented, with varying degrees of success.

Over time, efforts became increasingly focused on a particularly promising subset of police interventions, which we termed "strategic firearms enforcement". Instead of relying on fast response to 911 calls and post-incident investigations to catch violent gun offenders, strategic firearm enforcement seeks to prevent the *next* 911 calls by breaking the chain of illegal events that leads to shootings. The key elements of this strategy (decrease illegal demand, reduce illegal supply, discourage illegal carrying, and deter illegal use) can be organized in such a way that they compliment other community-based efforts, such a teen outreach and rehabilitation programs.

As evaluators of this effort, we were determined to remain aloof from the process and serve as dispassionate observers. We soon found it necessary to become deeply involved in the process in order to break down interagency barriers and keep the effort on track. Blurring of the previously sharp boundaries between evaluators and evaluated may be unavoidable in the "real world" of problem-solving policing, but it presents unique challenges to the to the academic partners involved in these efforts. The insights gained from this activity may be helpful to others who contemplate forging academic-community agency partnerships to reduce crime.

II. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

A. Magnitude of the Problem

Firearm-related violence by juveniles and young adults is one of the most pressing criminal justice problems in America. Between 1985 and 1991, the overall age-specific rate of firearm homicides in the United States increased 50 percent, from a rate of 5.1 per 100,000 to 7.6 per 100,000. The rate of homicide among adolescents and young adults grew even faster than it did among the general population. Homicide among 20-24 year olds increased 104 percent, from 9.9 to 20.1 per 100,000. Among 15 to 19 year olds, firearm homicides increased 187 percent, from 5.8 per 100,000 in 1985 to 16.6 in 1991 (source: National Center for Health Statistics). The 1994 rate of firearm homicide among 15-19 year olds was three times higher than the rate in 1984 (Snyder, 1996).

Homicide strikes particularly hard within the African-American community. Rates of homicide among African-Americans have always been higher than among whites of comparable age, but the gap widened even further between 1985 and 1991 (Zahn 1989, Fingerhut 1994). In 1985, the rate of firearm homicides among African-American exceeded that of whites by a ratio of 7.5 to one. During the next six years, this gap widened still further, to more than 10 to one (source: National Center for Health Statistics). By the early 1990's, more U.S. teenagers died each year from gunshot wounds than from all natural causes of disease *combined* (Fingerhut, 1993).

Fortunately, following a peak in 1993, firearm related homicides, nonfatal assaults, and gun crimes have declined significantly in the U.S.. According to a recent study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, fatal firearm injuries (suicides as well as homicides) declined 29.3%, and quarterly nonfatal firearm-related injury rates (the vast majority of which are due to assault) declined 46.9% (Gotsch et al, 2001). There are probably many explanations for this phenomenon, including a robust economy with more job opportunities for youth, aging of the population, declining crack markets, changes in sentencing guidelines, and violence prevention programs. There is little doubt, however, that proactive policing, particularly efforts to reduce illegal gun carrying and trafficking, have also played a role.

B. Impact of Firearm Violence on Youth

Nonfatal firearm assaults outnumber homicides by a ratio of approximately four to one (Cook 1991, Kellermann et al 1996). Many of these injuries result in significant disability (Kellermann et al, 1996). Violence is the second-leading cause of spinal cord injuries in the United States. (DeVivo, 1997) Many, if not most are probably due to a gunshot wounds.

Teens face a higher risk of gun violence than the general population. Between 1987 and 1992 the rate of handgun crimes committed against youths 16-19 years of age was nearly three times higher than the national average. Young African-American males face a particularly high risk of becoming a victim of firearm violence. In one study of gunshot injuries in three cities, black males 15-24 years of age were shot at *25 times* the rate of white males of the same age (Kellermann et al, 1996).

Most of the teenaged victims of gun violence live in America's inner cities (Rand, 1994). A 1992 study conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics determined that the rate of firearm homicide among 15-19 year olds is substantially higher in core metropolitan counties than in

fringe, medium, or small metropolitan counties. (Fingerhut 1993). Twenty percent of respondents to an anonymous survey of 1,653 male and female inner-city high school students reported that had been threatened with a gun; 12 percent reported they had been shot at (Sheley 1992). In another survey of inner city youth, 42% of those interviewed reported that they had seen someone knifed or shot, and 22 percent stated that they had seen someone killed (Schubiner 1993). Sheley and Wright found that nearly half of 758 male students in ten inner-city high schools with high rates of violence had been threatened with a gun or shot at on their way to or from school in the previous few years. One in three had been beaten up in or on the way to school, and one in ten had been stabbed (Sheley and Wright 1993). In light of statistics like these, it is not surprising that many inner city youth adopted a fatalistic attitude towards violence. (Harris 1993).

C. Kids and Guns

There is ample evidence that increased gun-carrying by youth produced the increased incidence of gun violence. This spurred, in turn, greater demand for guns (Blumstein 1995, Cook 1996). According to data provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, juvenile arrest rates for weapons violations nearly doubled between 1987 and 1994 (Snyder, 1996). Firearms introduced a deadly new element to even the most trivial teen disputes (Reiss and Roth 1993, Roth 1994, Cook 1996). Fights over girls, possessions and status are common during adolescence. In his landmark essay, "the Code of the Streets", Anderson (1994) described in rich detail how the need to defend one's honor is amplified in poor, inner-city neighborhoods. When ready access to guns is added to youthful bravado, the results can be deadly. The odds that a violent confrontation will result in serious injury or death are markedly increased when a gun is involved (Zimring 1968, Kellermann 1994).

Young people carry guns for the same reason that many adults carry them –an enhanced sense of safety or power. Many at-risk youth and juvenile offenders consider carrying a gun essential for personal protection (Sheley and Wright 1993, Cook 1994, Ash 1996). However, the benefits of carrying a gun for protection may be illusory. After all, a firearm is a "first use" weapon. In the language of the street, "Up (deployment) beats a draw every time". The realization that shooting first provides a huge advantage over an adversary leads to hair-trigger vigilance. This increases, in turn, the potential that a perceived threat will trigger a shooting (Roth, 1994).

D. Youth Access to Firearms

Young people in America have ready access to guns. (CDC 1990, 1995) Nearly sixty percent of respondents to a 1993 national survey of school children in grades 6 through 12 said they "could get a handgun if they wanted one." Twenty-two percent of respondents said that they carried a weapon to school at least once during the school year. Four percent said they had taken a handgun to school. Fifteen percent said that they had carried a handgun in the preceding 30 days (L Harris, 1993).

Surveys limited to inner-city youth yield even higher estimates of gun carrying than surveys of general student populations. Sheley and Wright surveyed a selected sample of 835 serious juvenile offenders incarcerated in 6 juvenile detention facilities and 758 male students in 10 high schools near these facilities; 83 percent of detainees and 22 percent of students reported that they have possessed guns. More than half of the detainees said they carried a gun all or most of the time

in the year or two before incarceration. Twelve percent of students said they carry a gun regularly, and another 23 percent said they carry a gun now and then (Sheley and Wright 1993).

What kind of guns do juveniles carry? Apparently, they prefer new, high quality semi-automatic weapons to older firearms (Sheley 1993, Cook 1994, Zawitz 1995, Ash 1996). Many street wise youth are wary of carrying an older, small caliber weapons, and are willing to pay a premium for a new weapon. In the words of one Atlanta youth, "...If there are no bodies on it, or if it is out of the box, then it is going to cost you more" (Ash 1996). If these observations are true, efforts to reduce illegal firearms supply to juveniles by targeting gun traffickers, straw purchasers and scofflaw dealers may be useful (Sheley 1993, Kennedy 1994, Cook 1994, 1996, Bilchik 1996, Ash 1996).

E. A "Problem-Solving" Approach

In its landmark 1993 report, *Understanding and Preventing Violence*, the National Research Council's Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behavior described the "problem-solving approach" to community violence:

"Successful interventions, sound evaluations, and basic science are mutually supportive but difficult to coordinate and carry out. There is little disagreement with the axiom, 'The best way to find out if X affects Y is to manipulate X and measure the change in Y.' Unless that is done effectively, neither researchers nor policy makers are entitled to make any definitive statements about what works and what does not....turning suggestions into workable and effective solutions to violence requires a problem-solving approach (emphasis added) that includes designing publicly acceptable interventions, evaluating them, using the results to refine the intervention, and replicating the evaluation. That process can contribute to improved violence control capability while it contributes to scientific understanding of violence. But it takes commitment by policy makers and the research community to the principles outlined below..."

The "problem-solving approach" is appealing in theory, but it is difficult to implement in practice (Reiss 1993). Local governments are reluctant to allocate scarce resources to evaluation. As a result, violence prevention programs are often implemented with little thought to assessing their effectiveness (Kellermann 1993).

The problem-solving approach emphasizes flexibility. This allows those responsible for implementing a program to modify their approach based on experience and feedback. Data are shared to determine what is working, what isn't working, and how the program can be modified to achieve its intended goals. Interaction fosters an ongoing sense of ownership and encourages commitment to the process (Cohen 1991).

F. Youth, Firearms and Violence in Metropolitan Atlanta

For the past five years, a consortium of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and prosecutors in metropolitan Atlanta has used the "problem-solving approach" to identify a promising set of strategies to combat juvenile gun violence. In the ten years prior to implementation of this project, Atlanta experienced a historically unprecedented surge in juvenile

gun violence. In Fulton County, GA (which includes most of the city of Atlanta) murders of young black males increased five-fold between 1984 and 1993 (source: Fulton County Medical Examiner).

In 1994, a five county area of metro Atlanta (City of Atlanta plus the counties of Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, Clayton and Gwinnett Counties) was designated a "demonstration community" for Project PACT (Pulling America's Communities Together). PACT was a federal initiative designed to bring communities and several federal agencies together to address crime and violence problems on a local level. The program was conceived by the Department of Justice and supported by the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and the Office of Drug Policy.

At the first organizational meeting of Metro Atlanta Project PACT, homicide, gun violence, and juvenile crime were identified as major issues. At a subsequent meeting the decision was made to approach illegal guns in the same way many communities are attempting to deal with illegal drugs - through 1) demand reduction (i.e., preventive education and deterrence); 2) supply reduction (by targeting illegal gun trafficking); and 3) rehabilitation of youthful offenders. PACT's supporters hoped that combining these strategies would be more effective than relying on any one alone (Roth 1994, Kennedy 1994, Cook 1996, Bilchik 1996).

On the strength of the community's intent, the Emory Center for Injury Control agreed to evaluate this effort. Funding was secured from a consortium of 3 research agencies: the National Institute of Justice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (NIJ grant #94-MU-CX-K003, Youth Firearms, and Violence in Atlanta: a Problem-Solving Approach").

III. PROJECT GOALS

- A. Use the "problem-solving approach" to plan, implement, evaluate, and refine a program to reduce juvenile firearm violence in metropolitan Atlanta, GA.
- B. Identify a complimentary mix of strategies to prevent illegal use of firearms by juveniles.
- C. Demonstrate the value of a *strategic* approach to violence prevention that combines the methodological expertise of researchers with the knowledge and experience of practitioners.

IV. OBJECTIVES

A. Assess fear of crime among community adults.

To measure and track county-specific levels of fear among metro-area adults, as well as their knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported use of firearms, we conducted 3 stratified, random-digit telephone surveys. The first was completed in spring of 1995, the second was conducted in fall of 1996, and a third was completed in 1998 (Kellermann, Fuqua-Whitley, 2000).

Each survey involved contacting a stratified sample of 100 adults, 21 years of age and older, in each of the 5 target counties (500 respondents total). Respondents were queried about their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes regarding youth crime and violence. They were also asked a series of questions about firearm ownership, acquisition, disposition and storage over the preceding year, as well as their opinion of the value of keeping a gun in the home for protection.

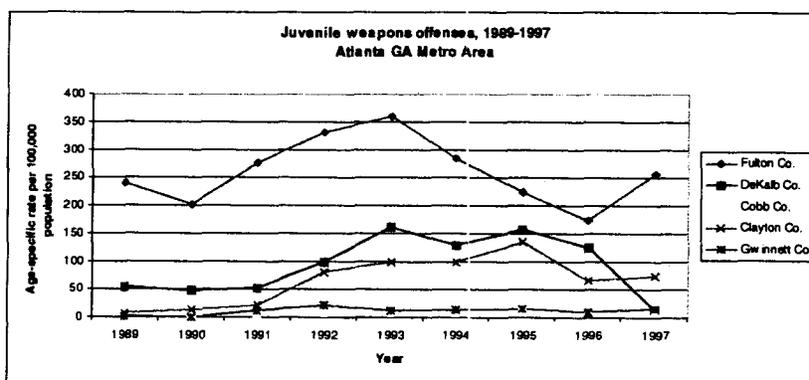
The survey revealed that citizen concern about juvenile crime varies widely by county, and roughly paralleled each county's rate of juvenile crime. Interestingly, citizens in every county expressed a higher level of concern about juvenile crime in the metro area overall than in their own county. When asked which group was doing the most to reduce juvenile violence, white respondents tended to give local law enforcement agencies the highest marks. African-American respondents, on the other hand, rated local churches more favorably.

Approximately 36% of the adults who responded to our surveys reported that one or more guns are kept in their home. Three out of every four said that at least one of these guns is a handgun. Less than one percent of respondents stated that they or a member of their household had participated in a gun buy-back program in the previous year. However, 10 percent of respondents reported that they or a member of their household had *acquired* a gun during the same span of time.

B. Track local patterns and trends in juvenile gun violence.

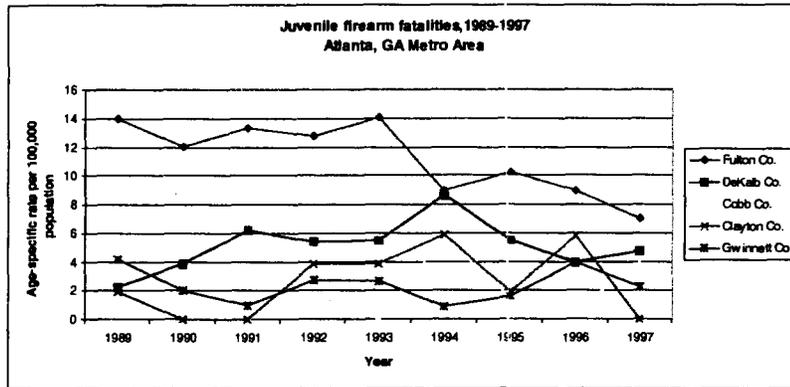
To monitor the annual incidence of juvenile crime and especially gun violence, we obtained data from a variety of sources, including: the Georgia Crime Information Center, a local firearm injury notification system, and all of the County Medical Examiners in the project area. This information was used to document current rates of juvenile assault with a firearm, other juvenile crimes with guns, firearm injury involving juveniles and rates of firearm-related death involving youth in the five study counties.

As was the case in much of the nation, weapons offenses involving metro Atlanta juveniles peaked in 1993 and generally declined thereafter. Fulton County weapons offenses declined 37% by 1995, but subsequently rebounded. Modest increases in gun carrying were noted in Clayton and DeKalb Counties in 1995, but have since declined. Arrests for gun carrying by teens in Cobb and Gwinnett Counties remained low throughout the project period.



The rate of juvenile aggravated assault offenses in Fulton County peaked in 1993, then declined 25% before rebounding in 1997. Minor fluctuations were noted in DeKalb, Cobb, Clayton and Gwinnett Counties.

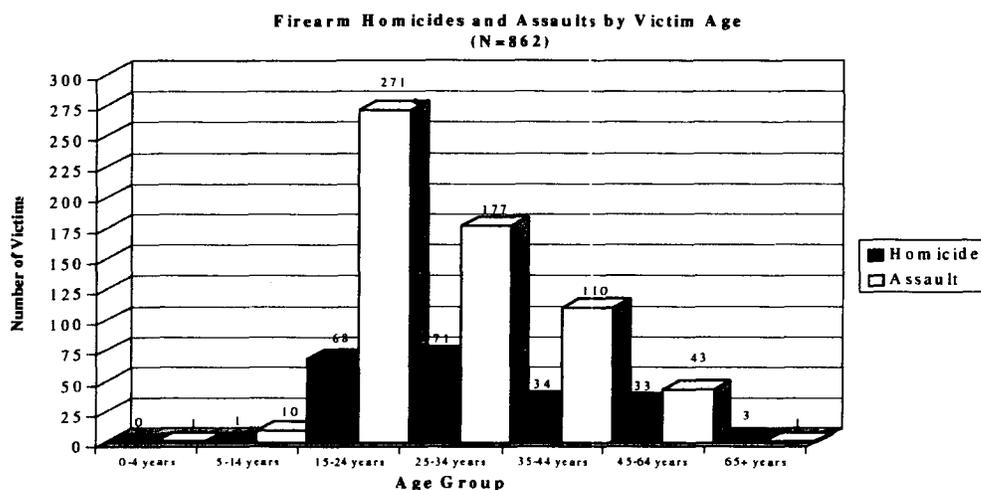
County medical examiner data were used to monitor county-specific trends in firearm-related homicide. Overall, juvenile firearm homicide rates rose to a peak in 1993, then began to fall. Each year, the majority of all juvenile firearm homicides in the metro area occurred in Fulton County. During the study interval, almost 80 percent of juvenile firearm homicide victims Metro-



wide were African-American. Eighty-four percent of the victims were male.

Data on nonfatal firearm injuries were collected through a regional firearm-injury notification system established with the support of another NIJ grant (see report on Regional Monitoring of Gun Violence: The Georgia Unified Notification System NIJ #95-IJ-CX-0025, and Kellermann and Bartolomeos, 1998). The system links data from metro Atlanta hospital emergency departments, law enforcement agencies, and medical examiners to identify and map cases of fatal and nonfatal gunshot injury. The system is used to produce maps of gun violence “hot-spots”, to identify patterns and trends in gun violence, and to assess the impact of law enforcement countermeasures. (Kellermann and Bartolomeos, 1998, 2000).

Data from the system demonstrated that a disproportionate number of victims of gun assault and homicide were adolescents or young adults. Not surprisingly, the majority of shootings identified to date have been committed by individuals of the same gender, age range, and ethnicity as the victims (Atlanta Police Department CJIS data).



Analyzing homicide and assault cases with GIS technology revealed relatively stable geographic clusters of shootings in south and west Atlanta. These areas are characterized by high rates of poverty, extreme household crowding, large numbers of single-parent households, high rates of unemployment and low levels of educational attainment (unpublished data, Center for Injury Control). In fact, 9 of the 53 beats patrolled by the Atlanta Police Department contribute 49% of the city's homicides (source: Atlanta Police Department). All 9 of these beats are located in areas of poor socio-economic status.

See Appendix: Figures 1-3.

B. Determine why juveniles acquire and carry guns.

To determine how, when, where and why Atlanta juveniles acquire and carry guns, we conducted a series of focus groups supplemented by individual interviews with at-risk youth, juvenile offenders and juvenile victims of gun violence. The information obtained from these interviews was compared and contrasted with the observations of a hand-picked group of local law enforcement officers and juvenile justice officials selected for their experience and expertise with juveniles. Observations gleaned from this process were used to identify promising strategies for subsequent implementation.

To learn the views of community youth, 4 focus groups were conducted with metro Atlanta teenagers in 1995 and again in 1999: one group consisted of 15-16 year old urban African-American males, another consisted of 15-16 year old suburban white males, a third was limited to 15-16 year old urban African-American females; and a fourth consisted of 11-13 year old urban African-American males. Each of these group included 8-12 young people. During each 2.5 hour focus group session, participants were queried about violence in their neighborhood, use of weapons in self-defense, attitudes about school safety, and the pros and cons of carrying a gun. They were also asked to suggest ways youth violence might be prevented.

Most of the participants appeared resigned to the inevitability of violence. Few expressed hopes that things will get better. They were unenthusiastic about every measure proposed to them.

A majority drew a direct connection between drugs, gangs, and the violence that exists today. Many participants, particularly members of the African-American focus groups, consider guns part of everyday life. Almost all of our interviewees, both white and black, claimed that they could easily obtain a gun if they wanted one.

To learn more about the attitudes of at-risk youth, three additional focus groups were conducted at local youth centers that serve "high-risk" teens. In contrast to white teens from affluent suburban neighborhoods, the white teens we interviewed at these youth centers reported witnessing as many incidents of violence as their African-American peers.

The second round of focus groups was completed in early 1999 (Dawna: verify date), using the same sampling strategy and group structure as before. (Note: these interviews were conducted *before* the Littleton CO and Conyers, GA school shootings, and before the Buckhead massacre in Atlanta). Although these participants viewed the situation more positively than the groups interviewed in 1995, common themes remained. For example, African-American participants continued to report experience with violence and exposure to weapons more frequently than suburban white youth. However, all of the focus group participants, both black and white, continued to note that firearms are readily available to youth. Other than school based "zero tolerance" policies, none of the participants in either set of focus groups were aware of any effort to keep guns out of the hands of juveniles.

To learn the views of juvenile offenders, we interviewed boys and girls incarcerated by the Georgia Department of Children and Youth Services (DCYS) and the Fulton County Juvenile Court. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. (Ash et al, 1996). Participants in these interviews were incarcerated for a variety of crimes, ranging from status offenses to murder. Forty-two of the first 63 respondents were male, and 21 were female. Sixty-six percent were African-American. The mean age of respondents was 15.7 (range: 13 to 18 years).

When asked what advice they would give to a friend who needed a gun in a hurry, the most common recommendation was buy on the street (57%), followed by steal (19%), borrow (9%), trade for one (6%) or buy a gun from a pawn shop or an adult "straw purchaser" (4%). Almost all of our respondents identified multiple alternatives if the first source didn't work out. Eighty-three percent stated that drug dealers often sell guns as well.

When we asked juvenile offenders how they feel when they carry a gun, 40% said "safer". Another 40% said that they felt more "energized" or "powerful". Interestingly, one-third reported feeling more anxious because they feared that they would be stopped by the police (Ash et al, 1996).

To learn the views of area law enforcement officers, we conducted a series of confidential interviews with local police officers, Sheriff's deputies, and juvenile justice officials who were identified by their department leadership as being particularly knowledgeable about juvenile crime and violence. Every agency in the metro area was asked to identify one or more representatives.

A majority of the officers we interviewed in 1995 stated that they felt less safe on duty than they did five years previously. Most cited the unpredictability of teenagers and easy access to firearms as the primary reasons for this concern. They were strongly supportive of preventive measures to reduce the illegal supply of guns to kids and deter young people from carrying a firearm. A subsequent set of interviews in 1999 produced similar findings.

C. Develop a complimentary set of tactics to reduce juvenile gun violence.

As information was collected, it was immediately shared with participating law enforcement agencies, juvenile justice programs, and community groups. We also held public forums to solicit ideas and discuss findings. Working sessions were held with grassroots community groups in May, July, September and October of 1995. Follow-up meetings were held periodically over the next 2 years. To insure that our findings were disseminated within the leadership structure of Metro Atlanta Project PACT, we also met regularly with the leadership of that group.

At the time the evaluation was launched, local officials envisioned a three-pronged approach to reducing juvenile gun violence: 1) *demand reduction* through youth outreach and community-based violence prevention programs; 2) *supply reduction* through public education and proactive law enforcement, and 3) *enhanced rehabilitation* through implementation of innovative juvenile justice programs. By closely coordinating the work of community based violence prevention groups with the efforts of juvenile justice and law enforcement officials, Metro Atlanta PACT hoped to amplify the impact of the initiative.

Community-based violence prevention

Initially, local leaders expressed strong commitment to the idea of adopting a "comprehensive approach" to gun violence. To identify candidate community services to enlist in this effort, we compiled a inventory of non-profit and faith-based organizations that provide after-hours recreation, mentoring, or peer-mediation programs to youth. We hoped that coordinating the work of these groups with each other and the overall effort would help them reach more at-risk youth and enhance the impact of demand reduction efforts.

It soon became clear that this goal was unachievable with the resources at hand. In light of the finite resources dedicated to violence prevention activities, no group was willing to modify their agenda or alter their approach to work more closely with others. Rather than antagonize local groups by appearing to favor one over the others, PACT abandoned the idea of a tightly coordinated "demand reduction" strategy. Instead, local charitable foundations and community agencies such as the United Way were encouraged to create more prosocial opportunities for youth by increasing their support of any or all existing program(s).

Another idea that failed to take hold was the notion that homeowners should be encouraged to secure their own firearm(s) to render them inaccessible to a burglar or their own children. Anecdotal reports from one local school systems suggested that as many as 90% of the firearms confiscated in schools came from the home of the child's parent or legal guardian. Ketchum Communications, a well-known public relations firm with offices in Atlanta, donated staff time to create a public education campaign around the slogan "lock and unload". Unfortunately, the campaign was not implemented due to lack of financial support.

A related effort to create free publicity for gun violence reduction by engaging the local news media met with mixed results. It was hoped that ongoing news coverage would encourage citizen buy-in, create a sense of momentum, and reduce community fear of crime. To stimulate interest in the story, a briefing for local news outlets (print, radio and television) was held. While the event was reasonably well attended, few stories were produced.

Some news stories were counterproductive. When a local TV station produced a two-part series on juvenile gun violence, it used video clips of local shootings and interviews with local youth to define the problem. To describe what could be done to address the problem, the station flew a reporter and camera crew to Boston to cover what was being done there. No mention was made of

Atlanta-based efforts to address the problem.

It was originally thought that community groups were the best opportunity to implement “demand reduction” strategies. When qualitative research revealed that most young people who carry a firearm do so for protection, we revisited this assumption. Few juvenile offenders or at-risk teens expressed fear that they would be arrested for carrying a gun. For more expressed fear of being harmed by an armed rival. These observations suggested that efforts to reduce demand might be more profitably directed towards reducing fear of victimization and/or increasing fear of arrest. Accomplishing either (and ideally both) objectives might tip the balance of pros and cons against the decision to carry a gun.

Juvenile justice interventions

At the outset of the project, leaders of Metro Atlanta PACT hoped to enhance rehabilitation of juvenile gun offenders through use of diversion programs and intensive supervision of youth on probation. (Then) Chief Judge of the Fulton County Juvenile Court, Glenda Hatchett, strongly supported the effort, and directed her staff to participate in task force meetings. She also instructed her staff to cooperate with law enforcement efforts to debrief juvenile gun offenders.

Unfortunately, these efforts were hampered by the huge load of cases in Fulton County Juvenile Court, a chronic shortage of probation officers, and budget cuts in core programs. These challenges were intensified when Fulton County Juvenile Court learned that the ownership of their primary facility had been transferred from the county to state government. When this happened, the court was forced to move on short notice.

While the Fulton County Juvenile Court was contending with these challenges, the Georgia Department of Children’s and Youth Services (DCYS) was hit with allegations of mistreatment in state facilities. This led to court-ordered mandates for remediation, and intense oversight of the agency. In light of these developments, neither organization was in a position to implement, much less evaluate, innovative strategies to rehabilitate juvenile gun offenders. Therefore, this idea was put on indefinite “hold”.

Law enforcement interventions

In contrast to the lack of success with community groups and juvenile justice agencies, considerable progress was made in encouraging area law enforcement agencies to take a proactive approach to juvenile gun violence. As a result of this effort, the Atlanta Police Department, the Atlanta Field Office of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, the Fulton County District Attorney, and the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia formed a strategic alliance to combat gun violence in the city of Atlanta. Other groups involved in this effort included the Fulton County Solicitor, Fulton County Probation, Fulton County Juvenile Court, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole. Progress did not occur overnight, but followed an extensive series of meetings, briefings and strategy sessions.

Maps of metro area shootings revealed that the bulk of firearm assaults and homicides are concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods of the city of Atlanta. Therefore, the decision was made to concentrate street-level enforcement in these neighborhoods. Because gun trafficking is more widespread, efforts to reduce the illegal supply of firearms to juveniles and adult felons were pursued throughout Metro Atlanta and beyond.

During the initial phase of consensus development, a working group of law enforcement officials was briefed on the baseline findings of our evaluation team. They also heard presentations by Lawrence Sherman, David Kennedy and other national experts who were brought to Atlanta to share ideas with the team. Drawing on local data, the experiences of local officers, and the advice of these experts, the working group crafted a set of interventions to address juvenile gun violence.

The approach that evolved attempts to stop shootings before they occur by four key points in the chain of events that precedes most firearm assaults and homicides: 1) illegal *demand* for firearms by legally proscribed individuals, particularly juveniles and adult felons; 2) illegal *supply* through gun traffickers, straw purchasers, or theft; illegal *carrying* so the firearm is readily available when needed), and finally, 4) illegal *use*. Since each of these represents an illegal act itself, breaking the chain of events through strategic law enforcement could prevent many shootings. Instead of reacting to the *last* 911 call, strategic law enforcement attempts to prevent the *next* 911 call.

The concept of strategic firearms enforcement is embodied in the name the Atlanta Police Department gave to this initiative - *Operation ICU*. "ICU" stands for "illegal carrying and use". However, ICU also stand for "I See You" (deterrence of illegal gun carrying) and "Intensive Care Unit" (emphasizing the program's goal of preventing nonfatal gun assaults as well as homicides).

The Atlanta Police Department's efforts are reinforced by several complimentary law enforcement initiatives, including the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms' Project *LEAD* and the *Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (YCGII)*. Both programs analyze data from large numbers of crime gun traces to pinpoint suspected scofflaw dealers, straw purchasers, and gun traffickers. *LEAD* focuses on individuals who supply guns to adult felons, while *YCGII* targets individuals who knowingly supply guns to juveniles. To insure that both programs are coordinated with the Atlanta Police Department's *Operation ICU*, a working group of officers from APD and ATF meet regularly to exchange ideas and plan joint operations.

The officers involved in these efforts have access to several state-of-the-art information systems to help them with their work. One is *Cease Fire*, a ballistics identification system (IBIS) developed for ATF for use by regional crime labs. IBIS creates a digital image of bullets and shell casings recovered from victims or crime scenes and compares them to an electronic "library" of tens of thousands of previously collected images. The system permits technicians to efficiently identify potential matches, or "hits" that can link bullets recovered from different crimes or victims to the same weapon. To increase the number of specimens submitted to the system, surgeons at Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta's premier trauma center, save bullets removed during emergency surgery for *Cease Fire* analysis.

Another is *Cops and Docs*, the firearm injury reporting system described earlier in this report. *Cops and Docs* collects reports of fatal and nonfatal shootings from area Emergency Departments, Medical Examiner offices, police departments and the Atlanta 911 Center and links the data to develop a comprehensive profile of fatal and nonfatal firearm injuries throughout Atlanta. *Cops and Docs* data have proven to be useful for identifying neighborhood "hot spots" of gun violence activity and tracking patterns and trends.

Criminal Justice Strategies

Despite explosive growth in the rate juvenile gun violence that peaked in 1993, the majority of fatal and nonfatal shootings in Atlanta continue to involve adults aged 21 years and older. Data from the Atlanta Police Department and the Georgia Crime Information Service indicate that the

majority adult homicide victims and a significant majority of adult homicide offenders have prior felony records. Furthermore, interviews with juvenile offenders made it clear that adult felons, particularly drug dealers, are an important source of guns to kids. On the strength of these findings, we decided that any effort to reduce juvenile gun violence must necessarily target adult offenders as well - particularly those with prior felony convictions.

To deter adult felons from acquiring and/or carrying guns, the Fulton County District Attorney and the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia agreed to work together to identify gun offenders who could be prosecuted under any of several federal statutes. The program, named "*FACE 5*" (*Illegal Firearms in Atlanta Can Equal 5 years in Federal Prison*) is modeled after *Project Exile*, a program that was implemented in Richmond, Virginia, and subsequently copied elsewhere. *FACE 5* was unveiled at a press conference at the Atlanta Federal Courthouse on July 6, 1999.

Rather than rely on incapacitation of large numbers of gun offenders, *FACE 5* is designed to deter adult felons from carrying a gun by threatening them with the prospect of federal prosecution. In fact, the actual percentage of gun offenders prosecuted under *FACE 5* is relatively small. The deterrent value of a program like *FACE 5* is maximized when news of successful prosecutions circulates widely on the street. To raise the visibility of *FACE 5*, the US Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia is attempting to use both formal media outlets (e.g., local newspapers) and informal social networks (e.g., parole officers and briefings of new arrestees) to spread word of the program.

Since the majority of gun offenders do not qualify for *FACE 5* prosecution, the Fulton County District Attorney is seeking to enhance the penalties for those who are convicted in state court as well. Currently, the Superior Court of Fulton County handles so many violent gun offenses that conviction or a plea in a nonviolent offense such as a felon in possession of a firearm frequently results in few sanctions. As a result, the deterrent value of arrest in these cases is minimal. To raise the stakes for gun offenders, the Fulton County D.A has requested a substantial increase in the amount of bond required to post bail. The impact of this measure would be to immediately increase the financial consequences of being caught with gun. He has also recommended tougher sanctions for those convicted of illegally carrying a gun. For a detailed description of all of the law enforcement and criminal justice interventions underway in Atlanta, please see Appendix A.

D. Implement these tactics in a defined geographic area.

The various components of strategic firearms enforcement (such as *FACE 5*, *LEAD*, *YCGII*, and *Operation ICU*) were phased in over a two year period, beginning in the fall of 1997. Since the Atlanta Police Department has primary responsibility for enforcement of gun laws within the City of Atlanta, it has assumed the lead role within the city limits. Because the Atlanta Field Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has jurisdiction in cases involving violation of federal gun laws, it took the lead role for mounting and sustaining anti-trafficking initiatives in the metropolitan Atlanta area.

To coordinate the efforts of the various groups and agencies involved in strategic firearms enforcement, three working groups were created. A tactical operations group was established to coordinate the various local, state and federal law enforcement agencies. This group meets monthly. To identify cases for *FACE 5* prosecution, representatives of APD, ATF, the Fulton County District Attorney's office, and the office of the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of

Georgia meet bimonthly to review case files and criminal histories. Overall coordination of Atlanta's gun violence reduction efforts, including FACE 5, Operation ICU, LEAD, and YCGII is provided by a steering group consisting of the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, the Chief of the Atlanta Police Department, the SAC for the Atlanta Field Office of the ATF, the Fulton County DA, the Director of the Emory Center for Injury Control, and other state and local officials.

F. Evaluate the impact of the initiative and provide feedback to encourage refinement of the approach.

Beginning with presentation of baseline data and continuing throughout the effort, CIC staff have shared their findings and recommendations with the officers leading the program. The operations group includes an Atlanta Police Department major, the lieutenant in charge of the APD's Guns and Violent Crime Suppression Unit, group leaders, section heads and agents from Atlanta Field Office of the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, and representatives of other state and local law enforcement agencies. Periodically, progress reports, crime maps, and evaluation data are presented for discussion. Approximately once each quarter, program evaluators brief the project's steering committee, which is chaired by the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia. Members of this committee include the Special Agent in Charge of the Atlanta Field Office of ATF; the Chief of the Atlanta Police Department, and the Fulton County District Attorney, and other state and local officials.

V. Next Steps

Programs like "Operation ICU", "FACE 5", LEAD, and others represent an effort to strategically enforce existing gun laws to reduce illegal acquisition, carrying and use of firearms by juveniles and adult felons. Over time, it is hoped that they will significantly reduce firearm homicides and nonfatal assaults in the City of Atlanta. On the strength of this collaboration, Atlanta was recently selected to participate in the U.S. Department of Justice's "Strategic Approaches to Community Safety" initiative, or SACSII for short. SACSII is designed to encourage local U.S. Attorneys in 10 cities to form partnerships with local community groups and agencies to address a particular crime problem. While Atlanta's partnership will focus on gun violence, the effort will be broadened to target offenders of all ages.

As the local academic partner for SACSII, the Emory Center for Injury Control is committed to supporting the effort by analyzing criminal justice and public health data sets, conducting serial interviews and focus groups, and providing ongoing feedback on the efficacy of various countermeasures. The "Cops and Docs" gun injury notification system will be used to monitor patterns and trends gun violence on a neighborhood level, with a particular emphasis on two target populations (15-24 year old males, and 25-34 year old males). In addition to interviewing at-risk youth and juvenile offenders about the availability of guns and the desirability of carrying one, we hope to collect data from adult offenders by incorporating a series of firearm-related questions in the DUF (Drug Use Forecasting) survey. DUF is administered quarterly to incarcerated adult offenders in Atlanta and several other U.S. cities. To gauge the impact of SACSII on community fear of crime, we will conduct at least one additional poll of metro Atlanta citizens, and compare the findings to our earlier surveys.

The primary outcome of interest will be the number and rate of firearm homicides of young males aged 15-34 (the age group with the highest rates of firearm homicide). Secondary outcomes will include the rate of nonfatal firearm assaults and on overall measure of community fear of crime. Changes in the knowledge, attitudes and self-reported behavior of juvenile and adult offenders will be qualitatively assessed as intermediate measures of outcome.

VI. Lessons learned

Over the past few years, a number of important lessons have been learned about applying the "problem-solving approach" to an issue as challenging as juvenile gun violence.

Lesson One: Building a partnership from scratch takes more energy (and more time) than anyone anticipates.

Our project was originally conceived as a two-year evaluation grant. Key elements included compilation and analysis of baseline data, presentation of findings to participating agencies, consultation with the stakeholders to devise a Complimentary set of strategies, post-implementation evaluation to determine if the interventions were having their Desired effect, and subsequent refinement of the effort. In reality, these steps took far longer to unfold than anyone expected. Compiling baseline quantitative and qualitative data was an arduous but relatively straightforward process, as was sharing findings with local stakeholders. Translating the findings into broad-based action was a different matter altogether.

Lesson Two: Achieving conceptual consensus about the importance of a problem does not guarantee that a practical consensus will be reached about how to deal with it.

Everyone involved in the effort agreed that reducing juvenile gun violence is a worthy goal, but they differed on the best way to achieve it. It was clear from the outset that officials from different counties held widely differing perceptions of the magnitude of the problem in their respective jurisdictions. Stakeholders in the city of Atlanta readily acknowledged that youth gun violence was a major problem, and were eager and willing participants from the outset. Officials from Fulton County (which includes most of The City of Atlanta) shared this view. However, representatives from the other 4 counties in the PACT coalition were less willing to commit personnel and resources to the effort, either because they perceived the problem as less significant in their jurisdiction, or they thought that they already had it under control. One official put it this way - "Why should I detail my officers to a metro (area) task force, when they'll spend all their time outside my county?" Over time, officials who were less invested in tackling the problem withdrew from the process. This allowed a smaller and more geographically concentrated group of partners to move forward.

Lesson Three: In the "real world" of community problem-solving, evaluators cannot remain aloof from the decision-making process.

Industrial engineers are familiar with the "Hawthorne effect" - the idea that formally observing behavior invariably changes it. In the early stages of the PACT effort, we attempted to

maintain a respectful distance from the decision-making process. It soon became apparent that this was neither practical nor wise. The process of collecting baseline data and sharing it with program participants inexorably drew us into the effort. The responsibility to monitor program progress and provide feedback when needed reinforced this view. Whenever the planning process began to lose momentum, we assume a more active role. Efforts included "shuttle diplomacy" between partners, active dissemination of data, meetings with key stakeholders, and bringing consultants from other cities to Atlanta to offer advice. Throughout the effort, we urged participants focus on a manageable number of interventions..

Lesson Four: Local data are needed to prompt local action.

Despite a growing literature on the Epidemiology of juvenile gun violence, and evidence from other cities that certain countermeasures are effective, officials viewed these findings with skepticism. We were frequently advised that "Atlanta isn't Boston". To overcome resistance to ideas generated elsewhere, we studied Atlanta's juvenile gun violence problem and used these findings to prompt consideration of new strategies and tactics.

Our analysis revealed that Atlanta's recent surge of gun homicides was driven almost entirely by an increase in murders of juveniles and young adults under the age of 25. Mapping gun homicides and aggravated assaults helped officials see gun violence "hot spots" rather than focus exclusively on individual events. Qualitative research with incarcerated juvenile offenders and high-risk youth generated practical ideas about how to deal with the problem. Not surprisingly, the tactics that emerged from this process were similar to those that have been implemented elsewhere with a measure of success.

Lesson Five: Successful collaboration requires suspension of self-interest.

Law enforcement officials frequently speak of the 3 "c's" of successful interagency efforts - communication, cooperation, and coordination. To this list, many add a fourth "c" - "compromise". Concerns about "turf" surfaced repeatedly throughout the project, as did worries about sharing information. Although rarely voiced in public, several stakeholders harbored reservations about the feasibility of the effort. Others were reluctant to commit precious resources to a venture that they could not fully control. Some were concerned that their agency would not receive its fair share of the credit if the effort succeeded.

Lesson Six: It is difficult to focus on long-term objectives when beset by short-term distractions.

Policy initiatives are not implemented in a vacuum. Every agency head involved in our project has to meet an ever-expanding list of challenges with an insufficient number of personnel. At several points in the process, program implementation was delayed or suspended because other issues took priority. For example, the project was initiated as Atlanta was preparing to host the Centennial Olympic Games. The Olympic Park Bombing, and the massive investigation and manhunt that followed, diverted significant resources from our effort. Despite a chronic shortage of officers, the Atlanta Police Department must promptly answer every 911 call and handle every investigation in a timely manner. In light of political imperatives like these, it was difficult to persuade our coalition partners to divert personnel from day-to-day demands in order to participate in a new and untested endeavor. The fact that they did is a testament to their foresight.

Lesson Seven: Change comes slowly to large and complex organizations.

When people become accustomed to dealing with a problem in a particular way, they can be very resistant to change. Resistance can take many forms, but the effect is the same – reform is delayed, altered, or halted altogether. Three examples may be instructive.

In the wake of the “Boston Miracle” we carefully examined the idea of implementing a similar set of gang-based interventions in Atlanta. At two separate points in the process, researchers and law enforcement officers from Boston were brought to Atlanta to brief local officials about their program. Despite the apparent promise of gang-based interventions, the program was not adopted for a variety of reasons. These include the fact that gangs in Atlanta are smaller, more mobile and less hierarchical than those of Boston, the perception that gang “turf” is less important in Atlanta, and the belief that gang affiliations in Atlanta shift too quickly to be a useful lever to modify members’ behavior.

A comparable effort was made to promote the idea of aggressively enforcing laws against illegal gun-carrying in “hot spot” neighborhoods, particularly during peak hours of gun violence activity. This was modeled on the “The Kansas City Gun Experiment” conducted by Sherman and Kansas City Police Department and subsequently reported by the National Institute of Justice. Professor Sherman was brought to Atlanta to describe his program and share the lessons learned.

On the strength of this evidence, the Atlanta Police Department eventually agreed to a small-scale test of this strategy in three “hot spot” beats. Officers from APDs “Guns and Violent Crime Suppression Unit” (a.k.a., “Gun Unit”) were directed to focus their enforcement activity in these beats with the objective of increasing gun seizures and gun cases.

While the unit produced an increase in arrests and gun confiscations, it did not achieve a more fundamental objective – reduction in gun related 911 calls and new incidents of gun violence (unpublished data, Emory Center for Injury Control). The lack of effect may be traced to differences in how APD’s effort was implemented compared to the successful effort in Kansas City. Instead of focusing on deterrence of illegal gun carrying through high visibility enforcement, the unit attempted to compile impressive numbers of seizures and arrests. Residents of the affected neighborhoods were not engaged in the effort, and the program received little coverage by the Atlanta news media. This undermined the impact of the intervention.

Gun Unit personnel privately complained that regular patrols tended to shift their activity elsewhere when they began operating in the area. This meant that the unit largely replaced, rather than supplemented, police presence in the target beats. Furthermore, the evaluation team noted that the unit’s hours of activity did not often correlate with the peak hours of gun violence in the target beats.

On the strength of this feedback, the Atlanta Police Department revised its tactics. Responsibility for street level enforcement of laws against illegal gun carrying was distributed more broadly among units of the department. Greater emphasis was being placed on tracing guns confiscated by in the course of police activity, and using these findings to identify potential gun traffickers and straw purchasers. A team of individuals from APD, ATF, the Fulton County D.A.’s office and the office of the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia meet regularly to study the files of gun offenders with serious felony records. Those who meet criteria are prosecuted under any of several federal statutes. To date, more than 35 individuals have been sentenced to federal prison for terms ranging from 3 years to 21 years (Nina Hunt, First U.S. Attorney, Northern

District of Georgia, personal communication). Efforts are being made to publicize this activity to maximize its deterrent value.

Conclusion

Turning violence prevention theory into practical and effective solutions is neither a simple nor straightforward task. Problem-solving research, by its nature, blurs the traditional lines between evaluators and those responsible for implementing interventions. Creating a collaborative partnership between researchers and practitioners presents unique challenges, but it also creates exciting opportunities. Community problem-solving can enhance public safety while simultaneously contributing to a greater scientific understanding of violence prevention and control.

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Appendix A. Detailed Description of Intervention Strategies

“Operation ICU”

Goal: Decrease the *unintentional* supply of firearms to youth and proscribed adults.

Strategy: Promote safe storage of guns in the home.

Background: Approximately 40 percent of households in metro Atlanta contain one or more firearms; three-fourths of gun-owning households contain at least one handgun (source: Compass Marketing Research, Emory Center for Injury Control). In 1995, fifty-two percent of the households contained at least one unsecured firearm (46% in 1996). Forty-four percent of gun-owning respondents in 1995 reported keeping at least one gun loaded (38% in 1996).

Keeping a weapon loaded and readily available violates a central tenant of gun safety. The National Rifle Association's *A Parent's Guide to Gun Safety* advises owners to “Always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use” and “store guns so that they are inaccessible to children and other unauthorized users”. The *Physician's Guide to Preventive Health Care Services* includes the following recommendations: 1) Never keep a loaded gun in the home; 2) Keep guns and ammunition locked in separate locations; 3) Always treat a gun as if it were loaded, and 4) Never allow children access to guns. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994) *Healthy People 2000*, a set of goals for public health in the United States, included as an objective “Reduce by 20 percent the proportion of people who possess weapons that are inappropriately stored and therefore dangerously available.” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990).

Public education to promote safe storage of guns in the home could have several benefits. It should reduce the risk that firearms will be lost due to burglary or theft, an event that occurs more than 350,000 times each year nationwide (Rand, 1994). Safe storage could also reduce the chances that a loaded gun will be reached by a child. (Wintemute et al, 1987). Homes where a guns is kept securely stored are less likely to be the scene of a suicide than homes where one or more guns are kept loaded and unlocked (Kellermann et al, 1992). Keeping guns securely stored may also reduce the chances that a gun will be smuggled out of a house by teenaged children or their friends (Sheely and Wright, 1995).

Intervention: The Emory Center for Injury Control has worked with executives at Ketchum Communications, a major public relations firm with offices in Atlanta to produce a pilot public education campaign. Working on a pro bono basis, Ketchum Communications devised an eye-catching campaign around the phrase, “LOCK AND UNLOAD”. The campaign includes public service announcements, logos, display items and point-of-sale information regarding the benefits of safe storage. Efforts to secure sponsorship for this aspect of the intervention are ongoing.

Coincidental with this project, the U.S. Department of Justice has engaged the National Ad Council to develop a national public education campaign to promote safe storage of guns in the home. It is anticipated that this program will be introduced in December 1999 or shortly thereafter.

When this occurs, we will be ideally situated in Atlanta to evaluate the impact of this campaign on homeowner knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behavior, as well as subsequent rates of unintentional firearm injury, gun suicide, and gun violence.

Goal: Decrease the *unintentional* supply of firearms to youth.

Strategy: Reduce theft of firearms from stocking dealers and other federal firearm licensees.

Background: Substantial numbers of firearms are stolen from federal firearms licensees each year.

Thefts of firearms from dealers have increased in recent years, perhaps because Brady law background checks have reduced criminals' access to new guns through gun store purchase.

Intervention: To enhance gun store security, the Atlanta Field Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms offers owners technical advice and assistance in upgrading facilities to prevent "smash and grab" robberies and other forms of theft. ATF is also working with local shippers, such as United Parcel Service, to prevent diversion of firearms during transshipment to federal firearms licensees.

Goal: Decrease the *intentional* supply of firearms to youth and proscribed adults.

Strategy: Check the criminal history of would-be purchasers of handguns.

Background: Shortly before implementation of the Brady law, Georgia adopted an "instant check" system to assess the purchaser's criminal history. Responsibility for this activity was assigned to the Georgia Crime Information Service at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Intervention: Individuals who wish to purchase one or more handguns in Georgia must present proof of identification and submit to an instant background check. If the purchaser is found to have a record of one or more felony convictions, one or more misdemeanor convictions for domestic violence, or is awaiting trial for a felony charge, the GBI denies the purchase. Individuals who have been denied the right to purchase a handgun have extensive rights to appeal under Georgia law. Since this system was initiated large numbers of would-be purchasers have been denied a new handgun. (source: Georgia Crime Information Service). Currently, efforts to follow up denials to prosecute individuals who misrepresent their criminal background are being increased.

Goal: Reduce the *intentional* supply of guns to youth and proscribed adults.

Strategy: Analyze patterns of crime gun traces to identify suspected traffickers, scofflaw dealers, and straw purchasers.

Background: Diversion of legally distributed firearms is a major source of firearms to criminals, juveniles, and other legally proscribed individuals. Juvenile offenders desire new, high capacity semi-automatic pistols as much as older purchasers. (Ash et al, 1996, Sheley and Wright, 1995). In light of this finding, efforts to identify and arrest scofflaw dealers, straw purchasers, and interstate traffickers may yield big dividends.

Intervention: The National Gun Tracing Center and its Crime Gun Analysis Branch have developed the capacity to analyze large numbers of gun trace requests from a given population in order to identify federal firearms licensees and/or first purchasers of firearms who appear in far greater frequency than might be expected by chance or a random theft. Based on this information, an investigation can be initiated to confirm or disprove that the individual is involved in illegal gun trafficking. Atlanta is one of 17 cities initially selected by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to participate in the agency's "Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative" (YCGII), an effort to identify and interrupt the illegal supply of firearms to young people. (ATF, 1997)

Through the YCGII, ATF is systematically tracing every gun seized from a juvenile in the City of Atlanta. By analyzing large numbers of traces, ATF can identify potential traffickers for

more in-depth investigation. If these investigations pan out, the district attorney and the US Attorney in Atlanta will work with federal, state and local law enforcement to develop highly publicized prosecutions against illegal firearms traffickers. This effort is in progress. The first indictments are expected soon.

Goal: Decrease *intentional* supply of guns to juveniles.

Strategy: Debrief juvenile offenders to determine the source(s) of their firearms.

Background: Virtually every new firearm is legally sold the first time. At some point in the subsequent chain of possession, an adult knowingly or unwittingly transfers the weapon to an under-aged youth. Historically, law enforcement officers have taken a dim view of drug dealers who sell to kids, but gun traffickers have escaped a similar degree of attention. If and when adult suppliers of guns to kids are identified, they should be prosecuted to the maximum extent of the law.

Intervention: Under Georgia law, juveniles who commit serious offenses (including homicide, robbery, sexual assault) are treated as adults. Through a cooperative agreement, the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, the District Attorneys for Fulton and DeKalb Counties, the Atlanta Police Department, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms are working together to identify juvenile and young adult gun offenders to debrief juveniles about the source of their guns. Cooperating with this debriefing is being made a condition for consideration of a plea agreement. The Fulton County Juvenile Court has also agreed to permit debriefing of selected juvenile gun carriers prior to releasing them from custody.

Goal: Decrease illegal carrying of firearms.

Strategy: Conduct record checks at pawnshops to identify stolen firearms and customers individuals who are legally proscribed from owning a firearm.

Background: Stolen firearms are fungible items. In Atlanta, as in many cities, it is not uncommon for individuals to pawn firearms for cash. Some of these weapons are stolen, and some of the individuals who pawn firearms possess criminal records that preclude them from legally owning a gun.

Intervention: An officer from the Atlanta Police Department's Guns and Violent Crime Suppression unit periodically reviews pawn shop records and records the serial numbers of firearms that have been deposited as collateral for a loan. If the weapon turns out to be stolen, or its owner has a felony record, the gun is confiscated as evidence and a warrant is issued for the owner's arrest. Interdiction of these weapons offers an opportunity to take "high-risk" firearms off the street, as well as felons in illegal possession of a firearm.

Goal: Deter illegal carrying of firearms.

Strategy: Enforce laws that prohibit concealed carrying of firearms by juveniles and adult felons.

Background: Although most of the juvenile offenders we interviewed stated that carrying a gun made them feel safer, more powerful or more energized, one in three said that carrying made them more anxious. (Ash et al, 1996) Fear of arrest was the principal source of this anxiety. This observation suggests that high-visibility enforcement, particularly in "hot spot" neighborhoods, may reduce illegal carrying.

Sherman and colleagues conducted the first formal test of this concept (see: "The Kansas

City Gun Experiment" NIJ #150855). In an area of Kansas City known to have high rates of gun-related violent crime, 1-2 units staffed by officers on paid overtime were instructed to seek out illegally carried firearms during "for cause" traffic stops and other enforcement activity. These units were not required to respond to 911 calls. After implementing dedicated patrols, gun seizures in the target area doubled, and gun-related violent crimes fell by 49%. No such changes were noted in a "control" neighborhood a few miles away.

Intervention: In 1997, the Atlanta Police Department organized a new "Guns and Violent Crime Suppression Unit" to implement many of the elements of Operation ICU. Several members of the unit were tasked with implementing targeted street-level enforcement in two APD beats that are historical "hot spots" of firearm violence (source: "Youth, Firearms and Violence" data and "Cops and Docs" data). The primary objective of this activity is to identify and arrest illegal carriers of firearms in order to deter carrying in the target area. In contrast to the approach used in the Kansas City Gun Experiment, APD directed the officers in this unit to back up patrol division units responding to certain 911 calls.

Although the unit confiscated large number of illegal firearms and made a substantial number of arrests, preliminary analysis of data from the intervention beats and two control beats in another APD zone suggest that that the effort had little impact. One of the reasons is that the effort received little publicity, so the deterrent value of the intervention was lost. Despite this discouraging finding, efforts to deter illegal carrying are being expanded to a larger number of "hot spot" beats.

Goal: Deter illegal use of firearms

Strategy: Refer serial gun offenders for federal prosecution.

Intervention: Because of the high rate of drug and other criminal offending in Fulton County, the County and state prison system are severely overcrowded. This created a "revolving door" mindset in state court, as gun offenders who are caught for illegal carrying or possession are quickly released with probation or a suspended sentence. One APD detective reported that when he approached a judge for a warrant to search the apartment of a suspected gun trafficker, he was told, "Tell me you've got more than just a felon with a gun."

In a move patterned after *Project Exile*, the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia recently announced *Face Five*, a program to identify and selected gun offenders in Atlanta for federal prosecution. Officials from the U.S. Attorney's office meet regularly with the Fulton County District Attorney and the Atlanta Police Department to identify felons with lengthy histories of violent crime who have been caught carrying a firearm. If the case is sound and the prior offenses can be clearly validated, the individual is referred for indictment in federal court. The first group of indictments was announced at a press conference in June 1999. Fulton County Probation and the State Board of Pardons and Parole have agreed to hand out "postcards" of those who are convicted to warn parolees of the consequences of illegally carrying a firearm.

Goal: Reduce illegal use of firearms

Strategy: Identify and arrest serial shooters.

Background: Evidence suggests that individuals who shoot others are more likely to shoot again in future incidents. Matching bullets and/or shell casings from disparate crime scenes (or victims) is a tried and true method that can successfully link one shooting to another. In the past, this had to

be done by hand, an extremely labor-intensive process.

Intervention: Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS) technology gives crime lab technicians the ability to magnify, scan and digitize the image of a bullet or shell casings, and instantly compare these images to an electronic library of literally tens of thousands of samples from prior victims and crime scenes. Two IBIS systems have been installed in the Atlanta area; one in the Crime Lab of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and one in a regional Crime Lab operated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. To facilitate collection of specimens from victims of nonfatal gun assault, a "bullet box" has been installed in the Operating Room of Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta's Level I Trauma Center, and DeKalb Medical Center, a Level II Trauma Center in neighboring DeKalb County. Local statistics have confirmed that 85% of nonfatal gunshot injury victims in the metro Atlanta area are treated at Grady, and many of the remaining victims are treated at DeKalb General. Bullets removed during emergency surgery are bagged, tagged and dropped in the box by the Trauma Surgeon. Collected specimens are submitted to the crime lab, scanned into the IBIS database, and compared to prior specimens. Firearms confiscated in the course of enforcement activity are test-fired so their bullets can be scanned as well. Matches or "hits" are referred to the Atlanta Police Department Guns and Violent Crime Suppression Unit for high-priority investigation.

Fig. 1 . Point map

Emory Center for Injury Control GIS Report

Firearm homicide, APD Zone 1 incidents by age – Atlanta GA, 1989-1997

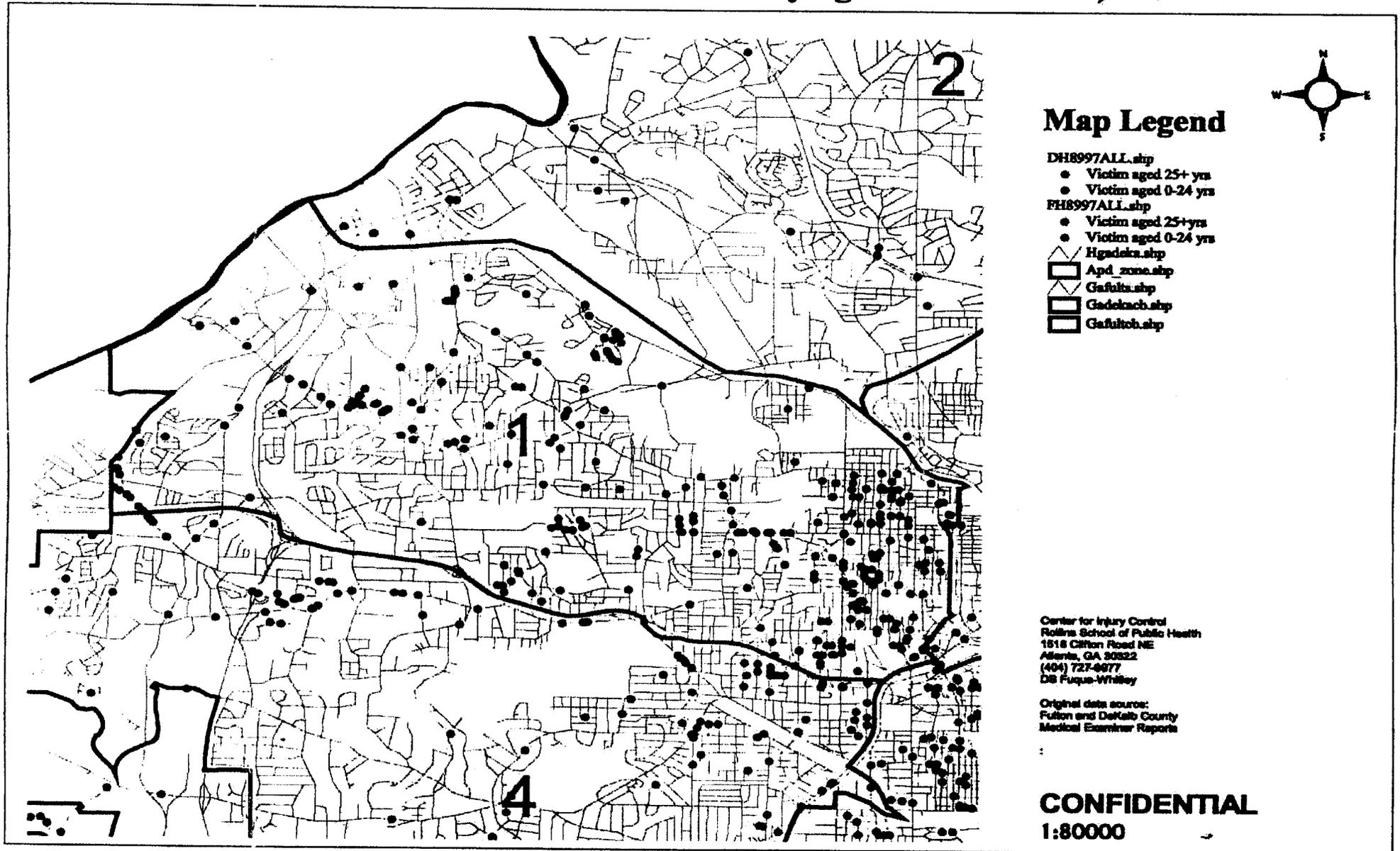


Fig. 2 . Aerial Map

Emory Center for Injury Control GIS Report

Firearm-related 911 calls, frequency by police beat – Atlanta GA, 1997

